

Call it a clan, call it a network, call it a tribe, call it a family. Whatever you call it, whoever you are, you need one.

— Jane Howard

Family has often been defined as people joined by a common biology or by law. The families featured on these pages demonstrate that becoming family is something more. Family is about reaching beyond what is familiar and comfortable and making room in one's heart and home for something more. More noise, more "mom, make him get out of my room," more groceries, more shoes, more "dad he's looking at me," more report cards, more mess, more worry, and most importantly... more meaning, more purpose, and more love.

The Fillos

Dawn and Steve married in 1991 and had two children, Ashley and Adin. Dawn was a mom who wanted to be home for their children and find a way to help other kids. Fostering gave the Fillos a chance to support children whose lives had been so painful while helping their children learn empathy, patience, and understanding.

The Fillos say that fostering has changed their lives forever. They never planned to be a permanent home for the children placed in their care. Despite their initial plans to exclusively foster, they have adopted siblings Jessica and Jacyn who are 7 and 4 and have since added two more foster children, a 17-year old teen mom and her 16-month-old baby boy.

Dawn says, "There is no better feeling than to watch a child who has built a concrete wall around themselves for protection learn to trust, love, and appreciate themselves." To the Fillos, that is a priceless gift.



The Londons

Jeremiah was stationed at Ft. Lewis when he met Kristen. The two fell in love, married, were transferred to Germany and had their son, Matthew. When Matthew was nine months old the Londons returned to Washington where Jeremiah started a career as a paralegal.

The Londons were contacted by the Arizona foster care system about being resource for Jeremiah's two nephews. The couple took the boys, who were one and two years old at the time. The birth mother, an addict, later gave birth to a girl who was also placed with the Londons.

Kristen later learned about an 11-year-old girl in need of a home. The London family now consists of 3 boys and 2 girls. Kristen is 25 and Jeremiah is 28. Their adopted daughter Maddison is 12, their biological son Matthew is 5; they have two adopted boys Jonathon (4) and Andrew (3) and an adopted baby girl. The London family grew from one to five children in two years. Kristen says there is no greater joy than helping a child. She says, "You do not need to foster 100 kids, adopt five kids, be married, own a home, or be a certain religion. You just need to open your heart to a child. That child doesn't care about the size of your house, your income or any other THING; they need a person."



The photographs of the families on the Family Means Something More pages were taken by DSHS employee and freelance photographer, Greg Cook.

The Bensinger Family

Alfie Bensinger was a single dad and soccer coach whose son had grown up and moved out. Alfie kept thinking he had a big house and he ought to either put it to good use or sell it. Alfie coached a couple of boys who were in foster care so he knew there was a need and he thought opening that house to foster kids "was the way to go."

When Alfie's son was growing up, there was always a bunch of kids over at the house. Now he is still likely to have eight or ten kids piled in front of their mammoth television set but most of them live there. The house is filled with trophies the boys have won for Motocross and other sports. Alfie has become the legal guardian for 17-year-old Kurtis and 14-year-old Adam. He also fosters 12-year-old Austin and another 14-year-old boy. Alfie said, "My boys aren't foster kids, they belong to me!"

He wants people who are considering fostering to know that, "there's good stuff and there's bad stuff but the good certainly outweighs the bad." Alfie tells the story about a serious motorcycle accident he had several years back. He didn't realize how bad the wreck was until he read the discharge report and it included details of his resuscitation. He half jokingly talks of getting to the pearly gates and St. Pete saying, "Your work's not done yet, you better get back down there."



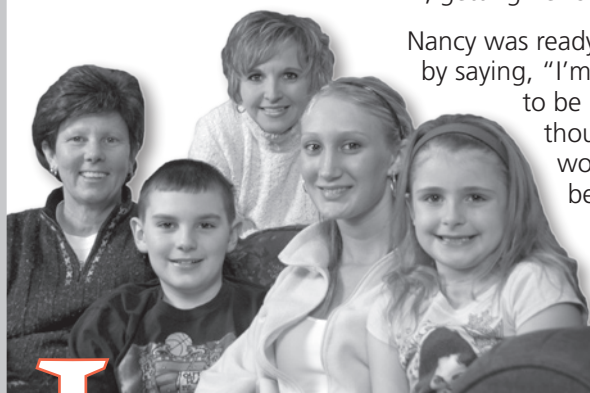
The Mathis Stewart Family

Shannon and Nancy always wanted children. As a same-sex couple, they went through the challenging and costly process to have son Rhys (Reece) and daughter Rhian (Ryan), now 10 and 7 years old.

They had been together 13 years and were happily raising their children and staying active in their community when a relative introduced them to Angie. Angie was fifteen, living in a group home and struggling to manage teenage life while pretty much parenting herself. A chance meeting at a pharmacy where Shannon saw Angie who was ill, getting her own prescriptions, gave Shannon pause.

Nancy was ready to take Angie before Shannon agreed. Shannon recounts her decision by saying, "I'm not a half-way kind of person so I knew if I took this kid, she was going to be my kid." Shannon agreed their home was the best home for Angie and thought if they didn't step forward, who would? They contacted the social worker, sought guardianship, became licensed, and Shannon and Nancy became Angie's legal guardians. Angie is "their kid!"

When asked what they would tell a potential foster parent, Shannon replied, "When you open your home to a child you give a life transforming gift. When you open your heart to the unconditional love that children give, you receive an even greater gift in return."



Love makes a family



Important Telephone Numbers

To report child abuse or neglect.....	1-866-EndHarm or 1-866-363-4276
To become a foster or adoptive parent.....	1-888-794-1794
To resolve concerns about the Children's Administration or foster care, contact Constituent Relations at	1-800-723-4831
To contact Office of the Family and Children's Ombudsman.....	1-800-571-7321
To find help for homeless youth living on the street or other unsafe locations	1-877-550-HOPE or 1-877-550-4673
To find child care resources and referrals.....	1-800-446-1114
To find health and human services information through the Washington Information Network	211

Websites

Adoption:

Washington Adoption Resource Network.....	www.warekids.org
Northwest Adoption Exchange	www.nwae.org
Northwest Resource Associates	www.nwresource.org/af.htm
Families Like Ours	www.familieslikeours.org
Adopt U.S. Kids.....	www.adoptuskids.org

Child Care:

Licensed Child Care	www.del.wa.gov/
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Domestic Violence:

DSHS Domestic Violence Program.....	www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/dvservices
Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence	www.wscadv.org

Indian Child Welfare:

Governor's Office of Indian Affairs	www.goia.wa.gov/
National Indian Child Welfare Association.....	www.nicwa.org/

Foster Parenting:

Children's Administration Foster Parent Website.....	www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/fosterparents
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Mental Health:

DSHS Mental Health Division.....	www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth
SAMHSA National Mental Health Information Center	www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/child

Social Services and Child Welfare:

Children's Administration Internet	www.dshs.wa.gov/ca/general/index.asp
DSHS Internet	www.dshs.wa.gov
Department of Health and Human Services.....	www.os.dhhs.gov

Substance Abuse:

DSHS Division of Alcohol and Substance Abuse.....	www.dshs.wa.gov/dasa
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The following summary of the Children's Administration Strategic Plan outlines the broad goals and strategic outcomes the Administration is working to achieve. We are identifying our progress in achieving these objectives in a variety of ways, some using outcome data and performance measures, and others using case record reviews and client, stakeholder and employee satisfaction feedback. We are continually working to improve our services and to improve child and family outcomes.

CHILD SAFETY

Goal:

Children will be safe from abuse and neglect.

Strategic Outcome:

Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.

Strategic Outcome:

Children are safely maintained in their own homes whenever possible and appropriate.

PERMANENCY

Goal:

Provide stable, nurturing, and permanent placements as quickly as possible for children who are placed into out-of-home care.

Strategic Outcome:

Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.

Strategic Outcome:

The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

CHILD AND FAMILY WELL-BEING

Goal:

Help families and communities improve the well-being of children in their own homes.

Strategic Outcome:

Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.

Strategic Outcome:

Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational and developmental needs.

Strategic Outcome:

Children receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs.

SUPPORTING CLIENT OUTCOMES

Goal:

Continuously improve the organization's capacity to achieve excellent outcomes for children and families.

Strategic Outcome:

The Children's Administration partners with and is responsive to Tribes, consumers, communities, courts and public and private agencies to serve children and families.

Strategic Outcome:

Adequate quality resources are available for foster care, behavior rehabilitation services, and adoption.

Strategic Outcome:

Service array ensures appropriateness, quality, accessibility and flexibility.

Strategic Outcome:

Information technology that has capability to support field and management needs.

Strategic Outcome:

Federal requirements for case review system are maintained.

Strategic Outcome:

Quality assurance system promotes satisfactory outcomes for children and families.

Strategic Outcome:

Agency has adequate and efficient structure, staffing and fiscal resources.

Strategic Outcome:

Staff and provider training and development adequately support the goals of the agency.

Glossary and Acronyms

Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA): Federal legislation passed on November 19, 1997, strengthening Titles IV-E and IV-B of the Social Security Act. The ASFA requires more accountability and better efforts and results from state agencies receiving funding, as well as from parents who have children placed in foster care. The law focuses on the safety, permanency, and well-being of children in care, and other positive outcomes.

Adoption Support: Financial assistance provided to adoptive parents following the adoption of a special needs child. According to RCW 74.13.109, a child is eligible if that child is “legally free” and “hard to place” at the time the adoption support agreement is established.

Alternative Response System (ARS): The CA contracts with agencies to provide ARS services to low risk families. Services help families develop community support systems in an effort to keep families intact without intrusive CPS intervention.

Behavior Rehabilitation Services (BRS): Agency contracted services for behavioral rehabilitation services for children and youth with serious emotional, behavioral, or medical difficulties who cannot be adequately served in regular foster care.

Braam Foster Care Lawsuit: A class-action lawsuit filed in 1998 on behalf of 13 children who experienced over 30 placements while in foster care. As part of the lawsuit's 2004 settlement, an independent Braam Oversight Panel was created to develop outcomes, benchmarks, and action steps for the CA on the six areas identified in the settlement agreement: stable placements, mental health services, foster parent training and support, unsafe or inappropriate placement, separation of siblings when placed in out-of-home care, and services for adolescents.

Case and Management Information System (CAMIS): Automated information system for the CA.

Chafee Foster Care Independence Act: Federal law passed in 1999 to offer services to adolescents in their transition to adulthood. The CA contracts with community-based agencies to offer outreach, individual assessment and plan development, skill building through instruction, independent living plan reviews, and case management.

Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA): Federal legislation providing guidelines for states regarding child protection.

CA/N: Child abuse and neglect.

Child Health & Education Tracking (CHET): A legislatively mandated screening program designed to assess children who are placed in the care and custody of Children's Administration. Specialized social workers complete an initial CHET screen within the first 30 days of a child's placement. The CHET assesses the child's well-being and identifies long-term needs in six life domains: physical/medical, developmental, educational, family/social and emotional/behavioral, connections. The child's Health and Education tracking is an ongoing process and continues throughout the child's time in care.

Child in Need of Services (CHINS): A part of the state's Family Reconciliation Act, RCW 13.32A., addressing children over the age of twelve who are beyond the control of their parents, have run away, and have substance-abuse or other at-risk behavior, or whose parents are unable, unwilling or unsuccessful in providing for their basic needs.

Child and Family Services Review (CFSR): The federal review of every state child welfare system which evaluates the service provision and achievement of safety, permanency, and well-being for children.

Child Protective Services (CPS): Entity within the Field Services Division, Child and Family Services and Licensed Resources, which responds to reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and provides services and/or placement if warranted.

Child and Family Welfare Services (CFWS): Provides both out-of-home placement prevention and permanency planning services to children and families who may need help due to serious chronic problems, abuse and neglect. Services are primarily available for cases transferring from CPS or FRS when the short-term services available through those programs are not successful in resolving the family's problems. Placement cases that extend beyond a court finding of dependency compose the majority of child welfare caseloads.

Children's Administration (CA): One of the Administrations under the umbrella organization Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). The CA is composed of four divisions: Program and Practice Improvement, Finance and Operations Support, Field Services, and Technology Services. The CA is responsible for a full continuum of services in Washington state and administers Child Protective (CPS), Child Welfare (CWS), Family Reconciliation (FRS), and licensure services throughout the state.

Crisis Residential Centers (CRC): Facilities available for short-term placement of children 12 years and older. These are often used for children who run away or are in conflict with their families.

Custodian: A person appointed by the parent, guardian, or court to provide care for a child.

Division of Licensed Resources (DLR): In July 2004, the DLR became part of the Field Services Division. It is charged with the licensure and oversight of state licensed foster homes, group homes, and other child placement facilities, and is responsible for investigation of allegations of abuse and neglect in licensed care.

Division of Children and Family Services (DCFS): In July 2004, DCFS became part of the Field Services Division. It is responsible for child protection, placement, and adoption services administered through 44 field offices in six regions throughout Washington State.

Early Intervention Program: Trained public health nurses are available to provide voluntary in-home nursing services which can prevent the need for more intrusive interventions in at-risk families with young children.

Family Preservation Services (FPS): Provided to families whose children face substantial risk of out-of-home placement (per RCW 74.14C), FPS draws on the strengths of families and addresses needs in an effort to keep the family intact.

Family Reconciliation Services (FRS): Available to families with adolescents who are experiencing conflicts, FRS consists of services devoted to maintaining the family as a unit and preventing out-of-home placement.

Family Voluntary Services (FVS): Treatment services designed to help prevent chronic or serious problems which interfere with a family's ability to protect or parent children. Services are provided to families on a voluntary basis.

FamLink: the name given to Children's Administration's (CA) new Statewide Automated Child Welfare Information System (SACWIS).

Guardian: A person or agency appointed by the court to care for and supervise a child, and who has legal rights to the custody of that child.

Guardianship: A permanency option that provides a child with long-term connection to a family while maintaining financial supports for the child. Guardianship placements are often preferred for older youth who may not want to be adopted, children who maintain ongoing and frequent contact with their parents, and children for whom religious or cultural factors discourage termination of parental rights or adoption.

Independent Living Services (ILS): Services provided, in accordance with the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act, to youth in the foster care system to help prepare them for independence.

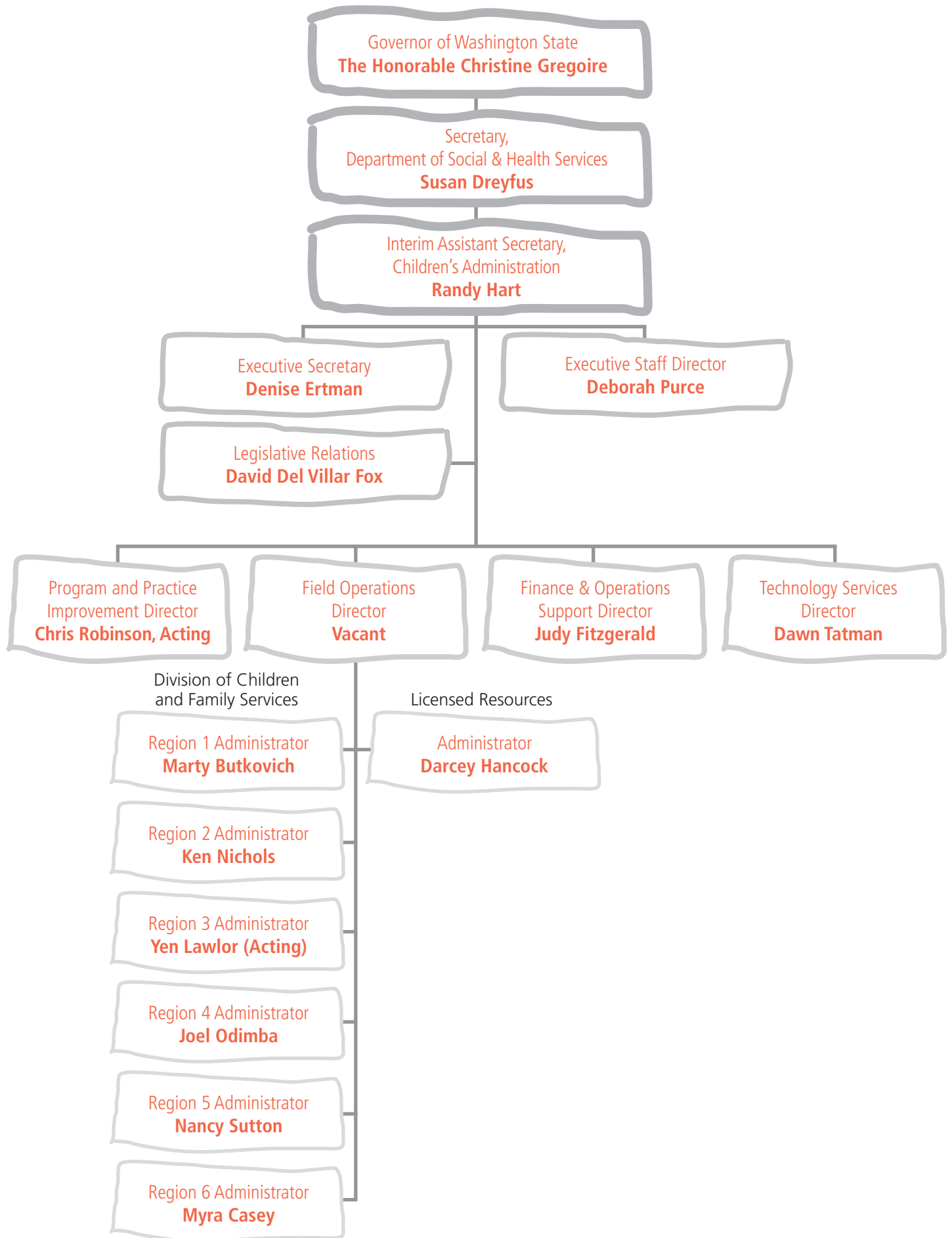
Indian Child Welfare Services (ICW): Child welfare services provided to Indian children consistent with the federal Indian Child Welfare Act (ICWA) in areas of child protective services, foster care, dependency guardianship, termination of parental rights, and adoption proceedings.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children (ICPC): A statutorily established mandate (RCW 26.34) safety net for children being placed into or out of Washington state.

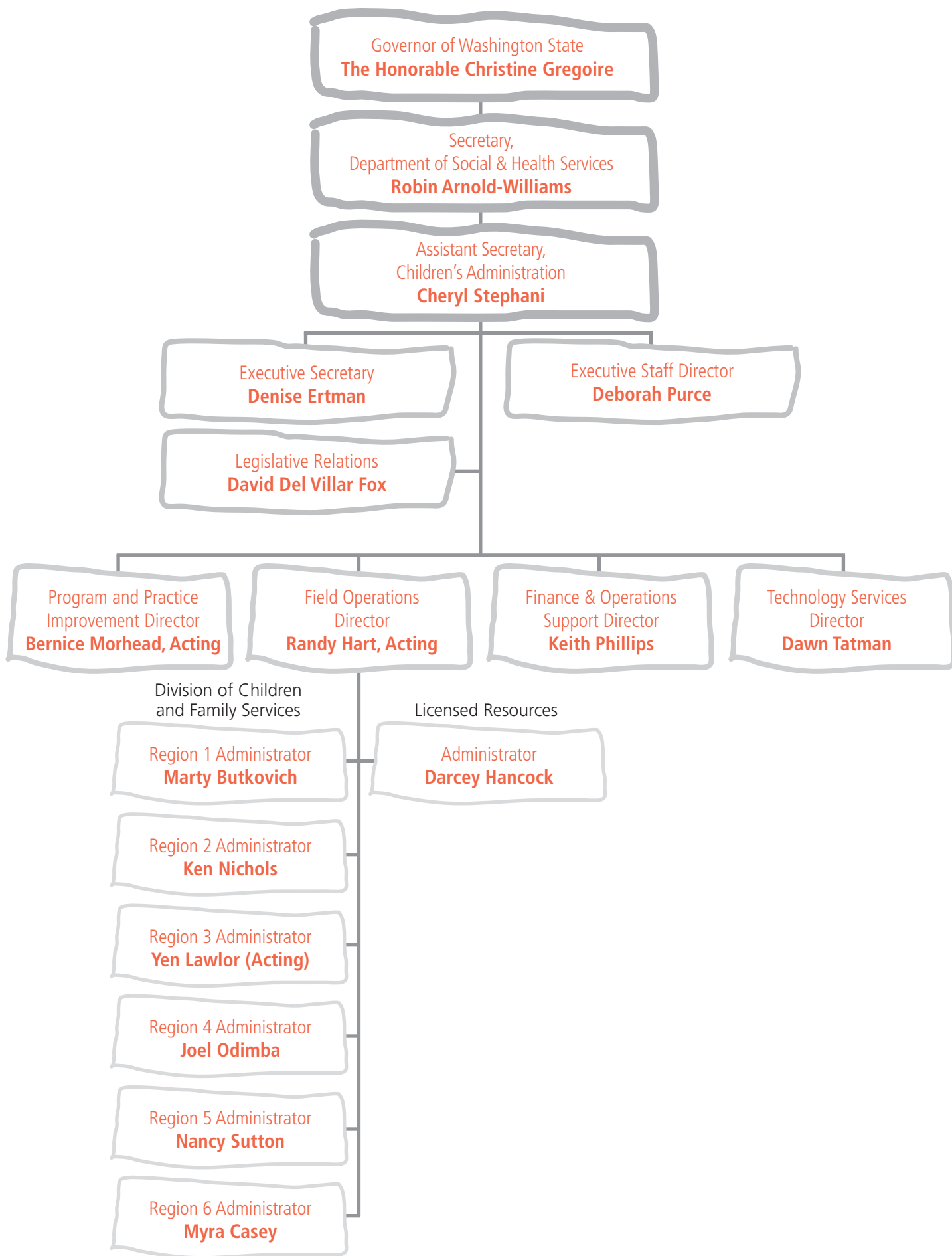
Legally Free: A child is legally free for adoption if the child has no legal parent, either because the parent has died or because parental rights have been terminated through relinquishment or involuntary termination by court order.

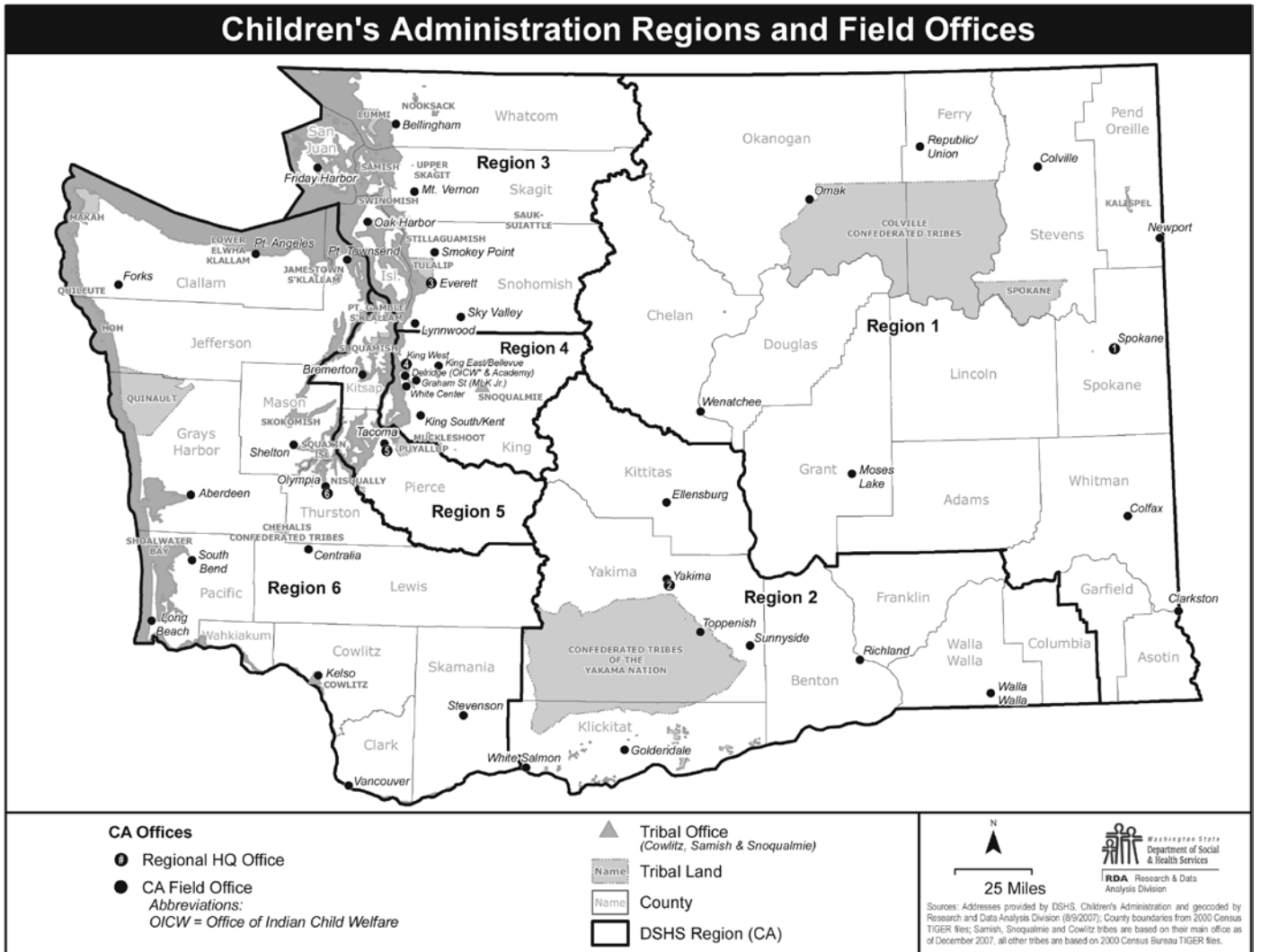
Out-of-home placement/out-of-home care: Placement of a child by the CA into a foster family home, relative placement, or group care facility.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR): When a child cannot return home and adoption is the permanent plan for that child, parental rights are terminated. The Adoption and Safe Families Act requires states to terminate parental rights when a child has been in foster care for 15 of the last 22 months unless there are compelling reasons not to file for termination of parental rights.



Children's Administration Organizational Structure as of June 30, 2008





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We acknowledge and honor all of the dedicated workers who are tireless in their efforts to protect children and preserve families. We also want to thank the many community partners without whom our work would be impossible: foster parents, adoptive parents, relative caregivers, respite providers, Guardians ad Litem, CASA volunteers, BRS providers, Tribal partners, Washington State Legislators who are committed to child welfare, and child welfare advocates statewide.

Most importantly we thank the children whose strength and resilience amid the most challenging of life circumstances compel us to never stop seeking to do better.

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